

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

PROGRAM

Mr. REID. So there will be three roll-call votes at about 11:30 a.m. tomorrow on confirmation of the Foxx nomination, on adoption of the committee-reported substitute amendment, and on cloture on S. 744, the comprehensive immigration reform bill.

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. REID. Following the statements of Senators CHAMBLISS for 15 minutes and Senator SESSIONS for 10 minutes, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate adjourn under the provisions of S. Res. 189 as a further mark of respect to the memory of the late Senator Hathaway of Maine.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Would the majority leader agree to 30 minutes for me before we close up?

Mr. REID. Of course.

Mr. SESSIONS. I thank the majority leader. He is always courteous.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The request, as modified, is agreed to.

The Senator from Georgia.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. CHAMBLISS. Mr. President, I rise to speak briefly on the bill before the Senate and more extensively on a section of this bill I have been working on diligently to improve.

First of all, I wish to commend the authors of this bill. I have been through complex legislation before and this is a very complex issue. I know how hard the so-called Gang of 8 has worked. We can't please everybody with any complex piece of legislation, but I think they have done a very credible job of putting together a piece of legislation that at least we could get to the floor for debate.

I think having this bill on the floor is causing us to have a very important debate that is long overdue. We all know our immigration system is broken and we need to fix it. However, I am disappointed we have not been able to have a full and open debate on potential solutions to fix the system. I have stated publicly that I have serious concerns with several provisions in the bill, including some related to border security triggers, interior enforcement, and the program designed to address our agricultural labor workforce. That last topic—agricultural labor—is what I wish to spend the majority of my time discussing tonight.

But before I focus on the ag piece of this bill, I just have to say that I am terribly disappointed and frustrated at the way this bill has played out. I am about to talk for several minutes or so

on straightforward, commonsense amendments to the agriculture portion of the bill.

I have been working on ag immigration reform for nearly all of my time in Congress, both in the House and in the Senate. That is a total of going on 19 years. This is an issue I care deeply about because I come from the heart of ag country in south Georgia. But guess what. I am not going to have a chance to vote on any of my amendments, not because they are poison pill amendments—they are not—not because many of my colleagues do not agree with the changes I am suggesting—many actually do. It is because the sanctity of a deal has been given precedence over sound policy. Let me say that again: The sanctity of a deal is being given higher priority over sound policy.

Now, I am not on the Judiciary Committee, and the chairman of the Judiciary Committee was down here a little earlier talking about everybody had the opportunity in committee to file amendments. They had over 300 or so. That is well and good, and I am glad this bill went through regular order. I wish every bill that came to the floor of this Senate would go through that same regular order. But I am also not a Member of the Gang of 8, so I have not had the opportunity to have input on this bill. Nevertheless, I reached out in a constructive way to various folks to try to make some changes to the bill.

I particularly want to thank my colleagues, Senator GRAHAM, Senator RUBIO, Senator BENNET, and Senator SCHUMER and their staffs for working tirelessly and in good faith with me to try to make some improvements to the bill.

I thought we were making progress, and I think actually we did. But now I understand that one or two Members want to prevent this bill from happening, and so I am not going to be given the opportunity to have my amendments called up.

What I can do, and what I will do, is highlight to my colleagues here and to my friends in the House of Representatives who may or may not take up this issue the problems I see with the ag portion of this bill.

The agricultural portion of this bill has not been discussed extensively on the Senate floor, but it is vitally important to all Americans. Farmers and ranchers in the United States produce the highest quality food and fiber in the world. The continued safety of the agricultural goods produced in the United States is an issue not just of convenience but of national security. Due to the importance of food safety, it is critical to know who is handling our Nation's food supply and who is working on our Nation's farms and ranches. Additionally, if our farmers and ranchers cannot access a stable and legal workforce, they will be forced to downsize or eliminate their U.S. operations, and that is happening today.

This leads to more of the food we eat being imported from other countries. I want to make sure we do everything we can from a policy standpoint to keep that food and fiber production right here in the United States.

Today the majority of immigrant agricultural workers are undocumented. We need both secure borders and put in place an immigration system that allows those who seek to come to the United States to work in the diverse sectors of the agricultural industry to do so legally. H-2A is the current ag guest worker program in force in the United States today.

I have been working on H-2A reform since I came to Congress not only because Georgia's farmers are among the largest users of the program, but because it is clear to me that the current program is cumbersome and difficult to use, as well as expensive.

My colleagues who drafted this bill have included many reforms to the agricultural guest worker program, and several of these reforms do take a needed step in the right direction. However, there are several areas that remain troublesome to me, and so I am proposing amendments to address some specific areas.

Mr. President, I know the section of this bill focused on agriculture represents a delicate political balance, but we have a responsibility to enact smart policy, and we also have a rare opportunity to replace the cumbersome and largely unworkable H-2A program with something that will truly address the needs of those in agriculture all across the country while ensuring that no American workers are displaced. We also need to ensure that we do not give those undocumented aliens working in one sector of our economy a vast preference over the rest of the illegal population in terms of the pathway to citizenship.

Before I talk about my amendments, I want to give Members of the Senate an understanding of how the agriculture piece of this bill is set up. The ag portion of this bill puts in place a blue card program to transition illegal aliens who have worked in agriculture to lawful permanent resident status.

It also creates a new agriculture guest worker program to replace the current H-2A Program. The blue card program is open to anyone who has worked in agriculture for 575 hours or 100 workdays over the 2-year period of 2010 to 2012.

Let me say that again. If you worked for 575 hours or 100 workdays out of the 730-day period of 2010 to 2012, you qualify for a blue card provided you had that work in agriculture. Frankly, to me, that is a very low threshold.

The general undocumented population covered by our RPI program which is in the base bill has to prove they meet the requirements to gain RPI status by a preponderance of the evidence standard of proof. However, for the blue card program, that undocumented alien only has to prove